



## Playful Prairie Dog

Prairie dogs are rodents and members of the squirrel family. Five different species live in colonies across North America's grasslands and shrub lands of the Great Plains. Prairie dog towns may contain hundreds of prairie dogs. The animals dig underground tunnels connected to chambers, such as sleeping rooms and nurseries. The tunnels go down about 30 feet and can be 50 feet from one entrance to another. Prairie dogs are most active during the cool hours of daylight. Most of their time is spent eating, and they also like to visit and groom each other. Prairie dogs have an advanced communication system and relatively low reproductive rates.

The spring and summer months can be a challenging time for prairie dogs and their ecosystems. After having an average of 3 to 5 pups in the spring, prairie dogs become active while exploring their ecosystems, eating and communicating. Human development and urban sprawl can also increase during the warm months. Prairie dogs are more apt to move to new locations, potentially getting lost, stuck, and put in danger when development spreads to their homes. Prairie dogs living on land which is earmarked for developments are often bulldozed to death, trapped and buried alive, or at risk of being poisoned.

On the other hand, prairie dogs are quite harmful to many farmers and ranchers. Horses can fall into holes dug by prairie dogs and break their legs. Once a horse's leg is broken it cannot recover and often times will die. They also dig up gardens and crops that farmers work hard to maintain. Although prairie dogs breed relatively slow for a rodent, their communities never stop growing.

What ideas do you have to control and save the prairie dogs in a humane way? Do farmers and developers have a right to be upset with prairie dogs?